

<https://helda.helsinki.fi>

Scribes in private letter writing : Linguistic perspectives

Halla-aho, Hilla

Oxford University Press
2018

Halla-aho , H 2018 , Scribes in private letter writing : Linguistic perspectives . in J Cromwell & E Grossmann (eds) , Scribal Repertoires in Egypt from the New Kingdom to the Early Islamic Period . , 10 , Oxford Studies in Ancient Documents , Oxford University Press , pp. 277-239 . <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780198768104.003.0010>

<http://hdl.handle.net/10138/310302>

<https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780198768104.003.0010>

unspecified

acceptedVersion

Downloaded from Helda, University of Helsinki institutional repository.

This is an electronic reprint of the original article.

This reprint may differ from the original in pagination and typographic detail.

Please cite the original version.

Scribes in private letter writing: linguistic perspectives

Hilla Halla-aho

§1. *Introduction*

Many, if not most, private letters from Roman Egypt (and generally in antiquity) were written by a person other than the one who appears as the sender. This article addresses questions concerning the manner of composition of private letters and the scribe's part in this process. Because private letters are important witnesses for language variation and change in text languages, we need to be able to assess the implications of this scribal aspect of letter writing for a linguistic study.

One might quite justly ask why it is important to know who produced the language of a letter. It is possible to argue that, regardless of who produced the language, it still is a reflection of epistolary language of the time, and as such, important for a linguist. To some extent, this of course is true. However, at least on a theoretical level, there are reasons why knowing something about the process of language production is useful, and even necessary. For example, should one wish to establish a connection between the language use and the actual sender, it is essential to know whose linguistic competence is presented in the linguistic form. On a larger scale, and concerning the value of papyri for linguistic research, if the language in many cases was produced by scribes, it is the output of a considerably smaller and more educated group of persons than the profiles of the actual senders of the letters would suggest. Generally, however, scribes do not constitute an insurmountable barrier between the scholar and the author's own words.¹

Many recent studies have touched upon this question.² Bagnall & Cribiore (2006) especially offer much interesting material and several important observations. Outside classical studies, scribal issues have been dealt with, for example, in connection with letters from Late Medieval England (the Paston letters), and recently by Dutch linguists concerning the so-called sailing letters.³

Before proceeding to the actual linguistic aspects, some general questions on scribal practices need to be addressed.

§2. *Scribes in letter writing in Egypt*

§2.1. *Who used scribes and why?*

¹ Bergs (2005, 79–80), Bagnall & Cribiore (2006, 8), and Verhoogt (2009). Note that Berg's observation concerns the forms of the personal pronouns, a feature that would have been easy for the scribe to change.

² Bagnall and Cribiore (2006), Verhoogt (2009), and Evans (2010a and 2012).

³ Bergs (2005 and the current volume) on the Paston letters; Nobels & van der Wal (2009) on the sailing letters (I owe this reference to Marja Vierros).

Letters from Roman Egypt usually do not mention that a scribe was used.⁴ In the typical case, a scribe can be identified as the writer when another hand has written something on the papyrus sheet. This is often the closing salutation.⁵ Sometimes the author of the letter even added a longer postscript in his own hand. In other cases, the sender proofread the letter and introduced corrections in the text.⁶ On the other hand, if we have more than one letter from the same person, and they have been written by different hands, it seems clear that a scribe was used for at least some of them.

One possibility is that the same hand has written letters that have been sent by different people.⁷ This does not happen often in the papyrus material, but there are occasional cases.⁸

Motivations for using scribes probably differed somewhat according to social class and level of education.⁹ The members of the upper levels of the society (at least the men) were usually literate, but also had the opportunity to use private secretaries. Their motivations for using scribes were at least partly comfort and ease. Even for a fully literate person, employing a scribe would have made the process easier, faster, and in many cases rendered a better result, in terms of handwriting and orthographic standards. Letters had to be written in large and clear letters, and the work was therefore slow and troublesome. In addition, using a scribe would enable the sender to attend to other duties while dictating.¹⁰ Furthermore, there undoubtedly was a custom of using scribes in antiquity, so that people who had the opportunity would rather use a scribe than write themselves simply because it was the normal thing to do. Thus, those who were most likely to write themselves did not do so.¹¹

While upper-class households may have employed scribes among their servants (or, in any case, persons who had received adequate schooling to be used as scribes), we have to presume that the average member of the population, of lower social standing and more limited financial means, could buy scribal services from professional scribes that were available in the markets or in the streets. Among these groups, illiteracy must have been common. Sometimes the scribes would have been literate family members, and at least for women, whose literacy was at a lower level than that of men, the easiest way would often have been to ask a male relative to write the letter on their behalf.¹² Thus, a scribe in a private letter is not necessarily a professional scribe. The term ‘social scribe’ has been used for these writers.¹³

The same person might on one occasion use a scribe, and on another write himself. The letters *P.Mich.* VIII 483 and 484 are both written by Iulius Clemens, a legionary centurion. All of 484 is written by the same hand that wrote the farewell wish in 483, and this can thus

⁴ See Bagnall & Cribiore (2006, 6–8). One letter where the scribe identifies himself is *P.Oxy.* LVI 3860, see Bagnall & Cribiore (2006, 45). On the other hand, sometimes there is a reference in the letter itself to the writing process that indirectly points to an autograph cf. νυκτ[ό]ς σοι ἔγραψα [τ]ὴν ἐπιστολὴν ταύτην εὐρὼν εὐκαιρίαν ‘I wrote you this letter at night, having found an opportunity’ (*P.Mich.* VIII 476, 20); cf. Nobels & van der Wal (2009, section 4.1).

⁵ See Luiselli (2008, 689–692). Bagnall & Cribiore (2006, 46–48) point out that what at first sight looks like a second hand might actually be the same hand writing in a smaller and more cursive script, as if more hastily.

⁶ See Bagnall & Cribiore (2006, 60).

⁷ Cf. Nobels & van der Wal (2009, section 4.2).

⁸ For example, *O.Claud.* I 126 and 127 (on which see below).

⁹ These have been discussed in Cribiore (2001, 229–230) and Bagnall & Cribiore (2006, 6–7 and 59–63).

¹⁰ Cribiore (2001, 229); Small (1997, 171–175).

¹¹ Bagnall & Cribiore (2006, 6 and 47).

¹² Verhoogt 2009; Bagnall & Cribiore (2006, 7).

¹³ By Nobels & van der Wal (2009).

be identified as that of Iulius Clemens himself. It is characterized by the editors Youtie and Winter as a ‘large, upright, elegant hand with little linking of letters’. Both letters are written in a good orthographical standard. Iulius Clemens employed a scribe even though he demonstrably was a good writer himself. It is possible that the use of a scribe in only one of these letters derives from a difference in the status of the receivers. We know that in elite circles it was regarded as polite to write in one’s own hand, undoubtedly because it took more time, thus showing the writer’s commitment and warm feelings towards the recipient.¹⁴ It is difficult to tell whether the fact that Iulius Clemens above wrote the letter *P.Mich.* VIII 484 to Arrianus in his own hand is indicative of the same feeling or not. Arrianus is addressed as a brother (ἀδελφός, which at least indicates a familiar relationship even if not actual brotherhood). The other letter (*P.Mich.* VIII 483), for which he used a scribe, was written to a person called Socraton in a respectful tone. But there may have been various reasons why a scribe on one occasion was used and on another was not. Sometimes scribes may have been unavailable or unaffordable. One factor that probably played a role every now and then was privacy: the author perhaps preferred to write a letter without the help of a scribe if the conveyance of personal information or feelings was needed.¹⁵

§2.2. *Passing on the message: dictating*

What do we know about the ways by which information was passed from the author to the scribe? This question is closely intertwined with the question of how the scribe contributed to the composition of the letter text and linguistic expression. Naturally, there is no one answer to these questions, as the situation will have varied from case to case.¹⁶

The most common way of passing information to the scribe was by dictation, at least in private letters. Normally, this would have happened at a relatively low speed, syllable by syllable (*syllabatim*), without (almost) any alterations to what the author said.¹⁷ In some cases, the scribe would have modified the language of the author to varying degrees (for example, by producing a standard form instead of nonstandard, or adding a particle). At the other end on the scale of scribal intervention are those cases where the scribe composed the letter text according to instructions given by the author.¹⁸ In private letters on papyri, composing a draft that the scribe then rewrote as an actual letter must have been relatively rare, and done only in special cases.¹⁹

An essential aspect related to dictation, and one that is often wrongly interpreted, is the relationship of dictating to speaking. Dictating should not be equated with speaking,

¹⁴ See Cic. *Q.fr.* 2.2.1 and 2.16.1; It is not a coincidence that the remarks on the use of a secretary in the letters of Cicero are all in letters to Quintus or Atticus, the two persons who would recognize Cicero’s handwriting (and those two to whom he usually wrote in his own hand), see Richards (1991, 69).

¹⁵ Criboire (2001, 230).

¹⁶ See Richards (1991, 23–53 and 97–111) and Bagnall & Criboire (2006, 59–65) on different ways to compose a letter.

¹⁷ See Sen. *Ep.* 40.9 for evidence that the pace of dictation was substantially slower than that of speaking. See Small (1997, 173–175) for further references on dictation in ancient sources. The ability of Cicero’s private secretary Tiro to take down whole periods at a time, using shorthand, naturally was an exception, see Cic. *Att.* 13.25.3 and Richards (1991, 99). For evidence of dictation taking place in a Vindolanda letter, see Adams (1995, 90; on *tab. Vindol.* II 234).

¹⁸ See Bagnall & Criboire (2006, 7–8) and below on *P.Amh.* II 131.

¹⁹ A draft letter of Flavius Cerialis is known from Vindolanda (*tab. Vindol.* II 225).

(speaking in the sense of ‘producing unplanned spoken language’).²⁰ A person dictating a letter knows that (s)he is composing a written text. What is relevant for language production is whether the speaker or writer plans beforehand what he is going to say or write. Moreover, written language and spoken language often show diverging conventions (e.g., in expressing salutations, but also in other areas). Dictating is thus equivalent to producing written language in spoken form.²¹

Part of this confusion is caused by the notion of ‘orality’. Language produced by dictation is ‘oral’ only as much as this refers to the physical action of using one’s mouth. This does not necessarily imply immediacy, informality, emotive language or lack of control (note that among Cicero’s letters, the more formal ones are those that he dictated, and the more informal ones are those that he wrote in his own hand!).

Dictated letters and autograph letters by less literate persons share many essential characteristics: the lack of connecting and ordering devices that are normally used in written language (particles and other connectives, hypotactic structures). This collection of features is labelled as an ‘oral style’ by Bagnall and Cribiore, in keeping with their conception of dictation as an oral process.²² However, it would perhaps be best to call it ‘simple written language’. The fact that a letter is not written in a fluent and elegant epistolary style, or that it is even clumsy by some standards, does not mean that it is a transcript of spoken language. The essential point is that we are dealing with variation within *written* language.

§3. *The linguistic approach: scribes as participants in the language production process*

Because the relationship between scribe and language is different with respect to different levels of language, they are best dealt with separately. A distinction can be made between the orthographical/phonological/morphological and syntactic levels.

§3.1. *Orthography / phonology / morphology*

Because the scribe was the person who actually wrote the words down, a reasonable assumption is that orthography was always produced by the scribe. After all, it is a rather simple process of encoding the phonetic/phonological shape of a word into writing according to certain rules. Most of the common nonstandard orthographical forms, including but not restricted to iotacisms in Greek, reflect sound changes that by the Roman period would have penetrated the whole Greek-speaking community, and even when there was variation in pronunciation, it would have been up to the scribe to decide what to write. The orthographic appearance of a letter is thus indicative, first and foremost, of the educational level of the scribe, and only in very rare cases is directly motivated by the pronunciation of the author.

A professional scribe could (and would) produce standard orthography regardless of who was dictating, and how.²³ Similarly, a social scribe would stick to his idiosyncrasies when writing a letter for another person. An example is presented by a set of ostraca from Mons Claudianus. The three ostraca *O.Claud.* I 137–139 have all been written by the same hand.

²⁰ Despite what is implied in Bagnall & Cribiore (2006, 31).

²¹ Cf. Small (1997, 182): ‘dictating what one has composed in one’s head.’

²² Bagnall & Cribiore (2006, 61–64).

²³ Adams (1995, 87–90); Evans (2010a, 66).

O.Claud. I 137 is a letter from Valerius Palmas to Valerius Longus, and *O.Claud.* I 138 a letter from Maximus to his sister Sarapias. In 139, the sender's name has not been preserved. The editor, Bülow-Jacobsen, suspects that Maximus, who sends his greetings at the end of *O.Claud.* I 137, is the writer of all three letters.²⁴ Maximus's orthography shows certain substandard features that occur in all three letters: a double <c> written where a single one is expected (137.13 and 21; 138.18; 139.12, 14 and probably 4), and omitting the <α> in the name Οὐαλέριος (137.1 and 2; 138.5; 139.15).²⁵

The Mons Claudianus ostraca provide even more evidence for a social scribe producing his own idiosyncratic forms in a letter. A man named Dioskoros apparently grew vegetables somewhere near the main fort. We have many letters from him, nearly all of which deal with the delivery of vegetables (*O.Claud.* II 224–242). The editor notes the discrepancy between Dioskoros' trained handwriting and his difficulties with Greek syntax, especially cases. This is visible most clearly in the opening address, where Dioskoros does not inflect the names of the addressees, not even when they are Greek and not Egyptian:

1. *O.Claud.* II 225.1–3

Διόσκορος Δράκων καὶ Ερημησις καὶ Ἀμμωνιανὸς κουράτωρ ἀμφοτέροις τοῖς φιλτάτοις πολλὰ χαίρειν)

‘Dioscorus to Dracon and Eremesis and Ammonianus curator, all his best friends, many greetings.’

If the editor is right in identifying the handwriting (very likely in view of the plates of *O.Claud.* II), Dioskoros also wrote one letter for another person, the *curator* Antonius Nepotianus (*O. Claud.* II 381, addressed to Iulius Ammonianus, the *curator* of Claudianus). The same inability to choose the correct morphological form can be detected in this letter:

2. *O.Claud.* II 381.1–5

Ἀντωνίῳ Νεπωτιανὸς κουράτωρ{ος} πρεσιδί[ου ...] [χαί(ρ)ειν] Ἰούλις Ἀμμων[ιανῶ] κουράτωρ Κλ[αυδιανου] (5) χαίρ(ειν)

‘Antonius Nepotianus, curator of the fort ... to Iulius Ammonianus, curator of Claudianus, greetings.’

The conception of literacy and writing skills was subject to varying standards, especially, no doubt, in such remote places as Mons Claudianus and its surroundings, but still it is difficult to imagine the context in which a person with such a poor command of Greek ended up acting as a scribe for a superior.

But even professional scribes with experienced hands sometimes produced nonstandard forms. A case where confusion is due to language contact is presented by a set of Greek-

²⁴ This agrees well with the idea of Verhoogt (2009) that the name of the social scribe would normally appear at the end of the letter, sending greetings to the recipient

²⁵ These are just two examples amongst a larger body of deviant spellings.

influenced spellings in one of the Latin letters of Claudius Terentianus (*P.Mich.* VIII 468). These are the accusative plural *nostrous* with <ou> (*P.Mich.* VIII 468.62), the accusative singular *illan* (*P.Mich.* VIII 468.28) with <n>, and the form *uetranus* corrected from *utranus* (*P.Mich.* VIII 468.6, *utranus* from the common Greek spelling οὐτρανός). As pointed out by Adams, these forms should be attributed to the scribe, who was accustomed to writing Greek, or was a Greek speaker himself. This conclusion is supported by the fact that by orthographical standards, letter 468 plainly stands out as the poorest of the Terentianus letters, abounding in phonetic spellings.²⁶ The case serves as a reminder that Greek-influenced forms in the letter of a bilingual person are not necessarily produced by the author.²⁷ This conclusion is important for the evaluation of Terentianus' Latin skills. The Greek influence can be seen in the orthography (morphology) and was produced by the scribe, not by Terentianus, although he was bilingual.²⁸

§3.2. Syntax and composition

In the sphere of syntax, things become more complicated, and there is a range of options available, according to the production process. If the letter was dictated to the scribe, he probably was not able to make alterations, at least other than inserting a particle or a conjunction here and there. However, there are also instances where the scribe was probably responsible for most of the wording and phrasing in a letter and the author merely indicated the contents of his message.

In the usual state of affairs, when only one letter survives from one person, it is not possible to compare the language and writing practices in a series of letters. This is why those cases where we happen to have more than one letter from the same person are especially important for research into scribal practices. Nevertheless, even in those cases where more than one letter is preserved from one person it is often difficult to say what elements in the language derive from the author and what from the scribe.

For example, *P.Mich.* VIII 490 and 491 are both letters from an Egyptian recruit in the Roman fleet in Misenum to his mother. They are written by different hands (by different scribes), and 490 has a postscript by a second hand, presumably that of Apollinarius himself. Letter 490 is written in a somewhat less elegant style: there is repetition of the verb δηλῶ and there are sentence beginnings introduced with καί. Furthermore, there apparently is an error in the opening salutation, where πρὸ παντὸς ἔρρωσὸ μοι ὑγιαίνουσα τὸ προσκύνημά σου ποιῶν παρὰ πᾶσι τοῖς θεοῖς 'Before all else I wish you good health and make obeisance on your

²⁶ Adams (2003, 542). On the difference in orthographical standards in the Latin letters of Terentianus, see Halla-aho (2003).

²⁷ For similar points raised in connection with Greco-Egyptian bilingualism, see Clarysse (2010, 47–48).

²⁸ *P.Mich.* VIII 468 is, in all probability, not an autograph. Strassi (2008, 27) suggests that the letter *P.Mich.* VIII 469 is an autograph of Terentianus. It is written in a less careful and practiced hand than the other letters, and it has different orthographic variants of the same word. Noteworthy is also the fact that the handwriting clearly becomes more careless towards the end of the letter (see the photograph in *ChLA* 42, 1216), another fact that points to a non-professional writer, see Bagnall & Cribiore (2006, 45). Of the Greek letters, only 479 has the closing salutation by a different hand, of the Latin letters only 472 (the letter by Tiberianus). Concerning possible autographs in the Latin letters of Terentianus, one should, however, note that the letters *P.Mich.* VIII 470 and 471 have been written by the same hand.

behalf to all the gods', has ἔρωσό combined with ποιῶν, instead of the normal, and correct, εὐχομαί σε ὑγιαίνειν, continued with the participle ποιῶν.

In the other letter (*P.Mich.* VIII 491), there seems to be more of an attempt at typical letter phraseology with γεινώσκειν σε θέλω 'I wish you to know' (ll. 4–5), ἐρωτῶ σε οὖν 'I ask you to' (l. 9), καλῶς δε ποιήσ<εις> γράψας{σ}ά μοι ἐπιστολὴν 'Please write me a letter' (ll. 11–12), and the vocative μήτηρ 'mother' (ll. 5 and 9). Note also τῇ μητρὶ καὶ κυρίᾳ πολλὰ χαίρειν 'to his mother and lady' in the opening salutation (490 has only τῇ μητρὶ).

The use of connectives is in line with this conclusion, although no dramatic difference is evident. The range of particles in both letters is normal with δέ, γάρ and in 491 also οὖν. Once in 491 καί opens a new construction (l. 13), but in 490 this happens three times (ll. 5, 7 and 9).

Thus, letter 491 shows a more elegant form of epistolary Greek in all respects even if the difference is not striking. Accordingly, even with a couple of scribal mistakes, this letter shows a form of language closer to what must have been perceived as an epistolary standard. It is, however, impossible to say whether this variation derives from the two scribes' different linguistic standards and styles, or whether one of the letters in fact reflects the linguistic competence of Apollinarius himself that the scribe reproduced on the papyrus.²⁹ It is possible that the other scribe was better educated and more independent in composing the letter text. Furthermore, at the end of 490, we find the salutation of Asclepiades to the recipient, thus rendering Asclepiades a candidate for being a social scribe.³⁰

The opening salutations are those parts in a letter that most easily could reflect the practices of the scribe instead of those of the author. In the letters of Apolloninarius, for example, one may note the additional address κυρίᾳ in the 'better' letter. In Claudius Terentianus' Latin letters, the opening salutation varies from letter to letter, the one in *P.Mich.* VIII 467 being the longest and most elaborate. Three of his Greek letters (*P.Mich.* VIII 476, 477 and 478), on the other hand, show the same long opening salutation, but these are all possible or probable autographs.³¹ In the Zenon archive, there is some evidence that letters written by scribes more often have longer salutation formulae than autograph letters.³²

The authorship and language use of women writers has been treated extensively in Bagnall and Cribiore (2006). The questions about scribes and authorship concern men, too, even if in the case of women authors they are more prominent because the literacy of men was, on average, both more common and at a higher level of competence. The results of Bagnall and Cribiore show that in many cases, the language use of women authors is still visible even in dictated letters.³³ In these cases, practiced handwriting and good orthography are combined with relatively simple syntax. The main characteristics of this simple style are the use of few connecting particles, little subordination, and mostly main clauses combined in

²⁹ In support of the latter interpretation one can note the idiom ὀκνέω γράφειν 'to hesitate to write' that appears in both letters: καὶ σὺ δὲ μὴ ὀκνῇ γράφειν περὶ τῆς σωτηρίας σου 'do not delay to write about your health' (*P.Mich.* VIII 490.12–13) and οὐ μὴ ὀκνήσω σοι γράφειν 'I will not delay to write to you' (*P.Mich.* VIII 491.14).

³⁰ See above (n. 24).

³¹ Letter 476 was written by Terentianus at night (see footnote 4 above), and is thus in all probability an autograph. The hand in 476 is similar to that in 477 and 478; see the descriptions of the editors Youtie and Winter in *P.Mich.* VIII (pp. 54, 58 and 63). See also White (1986, 173).

³² Evans (2012).

³³ Bagnall & Cribiore (2006, 59–63).

a sequence by the means of καί.³⁴ On the other hand, in the rare instances when dictated and autograph letters of the same person can be compared, differences (of varying degrees) can be observed between autographs and dictated letters. It is thus possible to distinguish between two types of scribal behaviour: transcribing (more or less directly) from dictation and composing the letter text more or less independently. It appears that these two types can be found in letters authored by men as well.

Lucius Bellienus Gemellus is the author of several letters, of which a number are published as *P.Fay.* 110–120.³⁵ Of these, *P.Fay.* 110 is written in a ‘well-formed, uncial hand of a literary type’ (according to the editors Grenfell and Hunt). This one is the earliest of the extant letters of Gemellus, and the later letters show his own handwriting.³⁶ His letters consist, for the most part, of a sequence of imperatives linked to each other with the simple καί.³⁷ The interesting thing here is that *P.Fay.* 110 also shows this same style, despite the good quality of the handwriting as well as the orthography. Furthermore, the following parallel expressions can be found when comparing *P.Fay.* 110 and 112 (one of Gemellus’ autograph letters):

3.

a) *P.Fay.* 110.3–5: εὖ ποιήσεις³⁸ κοιμισάμενός μου τὴν [ἐ]πιστ[ο]λὴν ἀναγκάσας ἐκχω σθῆναι τὸ ἐν αὐτῷ κόπριον ‘When you receive my letter, please have the manure heaped up.’³⁹

b) *P.Fay.* 112.1–2: εὖ πυήσις διῶξαι τοὺς σκαφήτρος τῶν ἐλαιώνων ‘Please urge on the hoeing of the olive groves.’

4.

a) *P.Fay.* 110.34: μὴ οὖν ἄλλως ποιήσης ‘Therefore, do not act otherwise.’

b) *P.Fay.* 112.21: μὴ οὖν ἄλλως πυήσης ‘Make sure that you do not act otherwise.’

5.

a) *P.Fay.* 110.16–17: καὶ γνῶθι εἰ πεπότισται ὁ [ἐ]λαιὼν δυσεὶ ὕδασι ‘and find out whether the oliveyard has been watered twice.’

b) *P.Fay.* 112.14–15: ἐπὶ ἡ γνοῖ ἐσκάφη ὡς τῆς Διονυσιάδος ἐλαιῶν ‘Find out whether the olive grove at Dionysias was hoed.’

³⁴ On connective particles see Clarysse (2010, 36–43) and Evans (2010b).

³⁵ White (1986 nos. 95–98). See now Ast & Azzarello (2012) for the archive and new texts belonging to it.

³⁶ Among the new (unpublished) texts of the Gemellus archive there is another letter authored by Gemellus but written in another hand, see Ast & Azzarello (2012, 70).

³⁷ Cf. Clarysse (this volume): A short and somewhat abrupt style with plain imperatives is typical in letters from high to low. However, the extensive use of καί is not in itself an inherent feature of such letters.

³⁸ This phrase appears in two further letters of Gemellus: εὖ οὖν πυήσας ἐξαυτῆς πέμσις αὐτὸν ἐξαυτῆς ‘Therefore, please send him immediately’ (*P.Fay.* 113.10–12) and εὖ οὖν πυήσας κοιμισάμενός μου τὴν ἐπιστολὴν πέμσις μου Πίνδαρον εἰς τὴν πόλιν ‘Upon receipt of my letter, please send Pindaros to me at the city’ (*P.Fay.* 114.3–5).

³⁹ The translations of *P.Fay.* 110–113 are from White (1986 nos. 95–97).

The obvious conclusion is that the scribe who wrote *P.Fay.* 110 closely followed Gemellus' dictation and produced what he heard without almost any alterations.

Similar cases in which there is an apparent mismatch between professional handwriting combined with standard orthography and less polished language have been presented by Bagnall and Cribiore. Such letters are for example *P.Oxy.* VI 932,⁴⁰ a letter written by a woman called Thais, and a letter from the Tiberianus archive (*P.Mich.* VIII 473) sent to Tiberianus by a woman called Tabetheus.⁴¹ The specific substandard characteristics of each letter are different (the letter of Thais shows omission of linguistic elements whereas Tabetheus' letter presents a disorganized narrative), but both seem to be the products of a professional scribe faithfully taking down the dictation of a less literate person. In this, they are clearly parallel to the letter of Gemellus, *P.Fay.* 110. The latter, however is a particularly important witness because of the series of autograph letters that confirm that what we see in *P.Fay.* 110 is the product of Gemellus himself, and not a scribe who controlled orthography well but syntax less so.

Sometimes, however, when we have many letters from the same author, the letters written by a scribe are more elegant in their turn of phrase and composition. An example is provided by two letters from Sarapion (*P.Amh.* II 131 and 132).⁴² The first of these, written by a scribe, is addressed to Sarapion's wife Selene. It is twice as long as the other letter that Sarapion himself wrote to his son Eutychides. In this case, the conclusion seems to be that whereas letter 132 presents Sarapion's own language use, the other letter was in fact formulated by a competent scribe.

I cite here the first half of *P.Amh.* II 131 (representative of the style and tone of the letter as a whole) together with the full text of 132. Both letters are concerned with practical matters, so difference in topics does not explain the notable difference in style:

6. *P.Amh.* II 131.1–13

Σαραπίων Σελήνηι τῇ ἀδελφῇ χαίρειν. ἕως ἂν ἐπιγνῶ τὸ ἀσφαλὲς τοῦ πράγματος περὶ οὗ κατέπλευσα ἐπιμενῶ, (5) ἐλπίζω δὲ θεῶν θελόντων ἐκ τῶν λαλουμένων διαφεύχεσθαι καὶ μετὰ τὴν πεντεκαδεκάτην ἀναπλεύσειν. μελησάτω σοι ὅπως ἀγορασθῇ τὰ κενώματα καὶ ὅπως τὰ παιδιά (10) περὶ τὴν ιδιοσπορίαν ἡμῶν καὶ τοὺς γεωργοὺς ἐπιμελῶς ἀναστραφῶσιν, μάλιστα δὲ περὶ τοὺς ἐνυφαντῶνι⁴³ ὅπως μὴ δίκας λέγωμεν.

'Sarapion to his sister, Selene, greeting. Until I learn that the matter about which I sailed down is settled, I will remain but I hope, the gods willing, to get away from talking and, after the fifteenth, to sail up. Make sure that the empty jars are bought and that the servants occupy themselves with the sowing of our private land and with the cultivators, and especially that they be concerned about the woven things, lest we have to speak about restitution.'⁴⁴

7. *P.Amh.* II 132

⁴⁰ Discussed in Bagnall & Cribiore (2006, 297–298).

⁴¹ Discussed in Bagnall & Cribiore (2006, 136–137).

⁴² White (1986 no. 106).

⁴³ Interpreted by Grenfell and Hunt in *P.Amh.* II as περὶ τῶν ἐνυφαντῶν.

⁴⁴ Translations of *P.Amh.* II 131–132 are from White (1986 no. 106).

Σαραπίων Εὐτυχ(ίδῃ) τῷ υἱῷ χαίρειν. περισ<σ>ῶς μοι ἔγραψας περὶ τοῦ μισθοῦ τῶν ἐργατῶν, σὺ γὰρ διὰ σου-(5)τοῦ ἱ. ἐπίγνωθι οὖν τὸ ἀσφαλὲς τί Πολεῖς διδοῖ τοῖς αὐτοῦ καὶ σὺ δός. δότω σοι δὲ Ὡρίων ὁ ἱερεὺς ἀργύριον ξάριν τῶν ἐργατῶν. αὐριον δὲ σοι (10) Ἀχιλλᾶν πέμψο ἵνα καὶ σὺ εἰς Ἑρμοῦπολιν ἔλθῃς

‘Sarapion to his son, Eutychides, greeting. You wrote to me unnecessarily about the wages of the laborers, for you yourself are in charge. Therefore, find out — to be safe — how much Polis pays his workers and you pay the same. Let Horion the priest give you the money for the laborers. Tomorrow I will send Achilles to you in order that you too may come to Hermopolis.’

In the first excerpt, one notes the elegant beginning with ἕως ἄν, the genitive absolute θεῶν θελόντων (although it admittedly was a stock phrase), the use of ὅπως (twice)⁴⁵ and of the highlighting μάλιστα δὲ in the sequence of orders. After the initial part cited here, the letter continues with careful sentence-connection (οὕτως δὲ ... ἐχρησάμεθα οὖν ... ἐκ γὰρ ὧν ... ἐπέμψαμεν δ’ ὑμῖν). The second letter, on the other hand, begins bluntly with a reproach περισ<σ>ῶς μοι ἔγραψας, and has a parenthetical expression τὸ ἀσφαλὲς ‘the safe thing to do’ (ll. 4–5), as well as καὶ σὺ δός ‘and you pay (the same)’ (l. 7) without an explicit object. It is worth pointing out that the first letter (131) also contains a reproach, οὕτως δὲ ἡμελήσατε ἡμῶν ὡς ἀνειρημένων τὸ ἀναβολικὸν καὶ ἐχόντων ἐκ τούτου εἰς ἡμᾶς δαπανῆσαι ‘You were negligent toward me, assuming as though I had received the deferred payment and could pay my expenses out of that’ (ll. 13–16). It is interesting that the correspondence related to Sarapion and that related to Gemellus are contemporary (early 2nd century CE), and similar in their topics, both concerning the management of a large family property. The linguistic competence of Gemellus and Sarapion was well-suited for handling practical matters, even if lacking in epistolary elegance. The letter *P. Amh.* II 131 shows what a competent scribe could do with this kind of ‘raw material’.

A similar case to that of Sarapion, by a woman writer, is presented by the two letters of Klematia (*P.Oxy.* XLVIII 3406 and 3407).⁴⁶ The one that she wrote herself (3406) is, according to Bagnall and Cribiore, characterized by an oral, paratactic style. They refer to the frequent use of καὶ introducing new requests, to the use of two consecutive imperatives in καὶ π ε ἴρα καὶ ἔρεον ἀνένικον (ll. 6–7), and to the variation in the use of plural and singular imperative forms (παραμέτρησον l. 3, βοήθησον l. 5, ἀπέτησον l. 9 are in the singular, but μὴ ἀμελήσεται l. 8 is in the plural). By contrast, letter 3407 is written in a more polished style. Bagnall and Cribiore point out the range of connectives used (ἀλλὰ l. 13, οὖν l. 18, δέ ll. 21 and 23), together with the fact that the occasional instances of καὶ never open new instructions.⁴⁷

§4. Concluding remarks

⁴⁵ For ὅπως as the more formal or learned conjunction (when compared with ἵνα), see Clarysse (2010, 43–45).

⁴⁶ Bagnall and Cribiore (2006, 213–216).

⁴⁷ One does note the form ἐμέναν (l. 21), but it really is not surprising given the late date of this text. The active role of the scribe in this letter is probably also shown by the fact that the sender is referred to as ‘the landlady’ in the opening address, without her proper name (the identification with the Klematia of 3406 is based on other factors, such as the name of the recipient, Pappouthis), see Bagnall and Cribiore (2006, 215).

The main points of this paper may be summarized as follows:

- On the levels of orthography and phonology, as well as (perhaps to a lesser degree) morphology, we see predominantly the output of the scribe, and only in special cases should we suspect that the author's idiolectal forms have been reproduced on the papyrus.
- The syntax and composition of a letter often represent the author's dictation, which the scribe reproduced on the papyrus.
- Dictated language produced by less educated authors can be called 'simple written language'. Being planned beforehand, it does not necessarily bear any close resemblance to actual spoken language.
- Although following the author's dictation word-by-word was a normal and perhaps even prevalent practice, letters on papyri show clear instances of letters not only penned but also composed on the behalf of their senders by a competent scribe, and being stylistically far removed from the language and style that the authors themselves were able (or wanted) to produce.
- The analysis of the letters by Lucius Bellienus Gemellus and Sarapion supplements some of the results of Bagnall and Cribiore by pointing out that similar processes were at work also in letters authored by men.

References

- Adams, J.N. 1995. 'The Language of the Vindolanda Writing-Tablets: An Interim Report,' *Journal of Roman Studies* 85: 86–134.
- 2003. *Bilingualism and the Latin language* (Cambridge).
- Ast, R. & Azzarello, G. 2012. 'A Roman veteran and his skilful administrator: Gemellus and Epagathus in light of unpublished papyri,' in P. Schubert (ed.) *Actes du 26e Congrès international de papyrologie (Genève 2010)* (Genève): 67–71.
- Bagnall, R.S. & Cribiore, R. 2006. *Womens' Letters from Ancient Egypt 300 BC – AD 800*. (Ann Arbor).
- Bergs, A. 2005. *Social Networks and Historical Sociolinguistics. Studies in Morphosyntactic Variation in the Paston Letters (1421-1503)* (Berlin – New York).
- Clarysse, W. 2010. 'Linguistic Diversity in the Archive of the Engineers Kleon and Theodoros,' in T.V. Evans & D.D. Obbink (eds) *The Language of the Papyri* (Oxford): 35–50.
- Cribiore, R. 2001. 'Windows on a Woman's World. Some Letters from Roman Egypt,' in A. Lardinois & L. McClure (eds) *Making Silence Speak. Women's voices in Greek literature and society* (Princeton – Oxford): 223–239.
- Evans, T.V. 2010a. 'Identifying the Language of the Individual in the Zenon Archive,' in T.V. Evans & D.D. Obbink (eds) *The Language of the Papyri* (Oxford): 53–70.
- 2010b. 'Standard Koine Greek in Third Century BC Papyri,' in T. Gagos (ed.) *Proceedings of the Twenty-Fifth International Congress of Papyrology, Ann Arbor, July 29-August 4, 2007* (Ann Arbor): 197–205.

- (2012). 'Linguistic and Stylistic Variation in the Zenon Archive,' in M. Leiwo, H. Halla-aho & M. Vierros (eds) *Variation and Change in Greek and Latin*. (Helsinki): 25–42.
- Halla-aho, H. 2003. 'Scribes and the Letters of Claudius Terentianus,' in H. Solin, M. Leiwo & H. Halla-aho (eds) *Latin vulgaire — latin tardif VI. Actes du VIe Colloque international sur le latin vulgaire et tardif, Helsinki 29 août — 2 septembre 2000* (Hildesheim): 245–252.
- Luiselli, R. 2008. 'Greek Letters on Papyrus, First to Eighth Centuries: a Survey', *Asiatische Studien / Études Asiatiques* 62 (2008) 677–737.
- Nobels, J. & van der Wal, M. 2009. 'Tackling the Writer-Sender Problem: the Newly Developed Leiden Identification Procedure,' Internet Journal *Historical Sociolinguistics and Sociohistorical Linguistics* 9 (http://www.let.leidenuniv.nl/hsl_shl/Nobels-Wal.html).
- Richards, R.E. 1991. *The Secretary in the Letters of Paul* (Tübingen).
- Small, J. P. 1997. *Wax Tablets of the Mind. Cognitive Studies of Memory and Literacy in Classical Antiquity* (London).
- Strassi, S. 2008. *L'archivio di Claudius Tiberianus da Karanis* (Berlin – New York).
- Verhoogt, A. 2009. 'Dictating Letters in Greek and Roman Egypt from a Comparative Perspective' (working paper: <http://sitemaker.umich.edu/verhoogt/files/dictating1.pdf>).
- White, J.L. 1986. *Light from Ancient Letters* (Philadelphia).